11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

*121 602 601 shown by the vagueness of Amhara kin terminology. The term for brother, *wandam*, also applies to all the male relatives of one's generation and even to one's close friends. Similarly, the terms for uncle and aunt (*agot* and *akeste*) are sometimes used for nephew, niece, and cousin as well; and often these terms are simply replaced by the abstract generic word for kin, *zamad*.

*121 602 The extent of reciprocal obligations among kin outside the nuclear family is a function primarily of the amount of spontaneous affection that exists among the individuals concerned and how close they happen to live to each other. Relatives on good terms with one another normally take turns visiting one another and eating together on holidays. They help one another in the event of sickness, death, fire, litigation, and murder. Orphaned or economically burdensome children are often farmed out to the households of more successful relatives.

*121 602 593 These activities are based on voluntary reciprocity or good will. In its formal structure, the Amhara kinship system stresses the independence of the nuclear family. Although it occasionally happens that married brothers live in a single large compound under the moral authority of their father or an older brother, who is known as its *alaqā* and is responsible for the compound's payment of taxes, each nuclear family lives in separate quarters and produces and consumes its own supply of food by working its own separate acreage of land.

*121 594 421 Within the nuclear family itself, the ties that bind are limited by certain fundamental safeguards of individual rights. One is the institution of private property. The land which each partner brings into a marriage or later acquires through bequests remains his own until death. If they should separate, each takes his own land, and the goods acquired by the household during their marriage are divided equally between them. There is also the provision of *gīl*, a quantity of property that either or both of the spouses may designate, prior to getting married, as strictly private property and indivisible in case of divorce. In the event that a nuclear family enters one of the modern savings associations or *equb* (to be discussed below), husband and wife join as separate members.

*121 593 586 [585] The possibility of divorce is another safeguard of individual rights within the nuclear family. Only in the *querbān* type of marriage is divorce forbidden. This form is normally restricted to priests and very devout, usually older, people; and even then divorces sometimes occur, the couple preferring the displeasure of the church to a life of continued antagonism. The standard sort of marriage is the *samānya* or contract form, in which the equivalent of a simple "I do" concludes the match and a simple "I do not" legitimates divorce. The divorce may be initiated by either husband or wife. An Amharic

11:Levine Z-4,5 (1958-1961)1965 MP5 Amhara MP5

proverb which stresses the rights of women in this regard gives the following advice:

> *Balāgar sitagab yematal ba-degger;*
> *Tayawennā nay qitāwen yegāgger.*
>
> When a peasant gets sated he beats you with wood;
> Leave and come home, let him bake his own bread!

A couple who have firmly decided upon divorce need simply call in their relatives or go before the *çhĭqā shum* in order to have their property properly divided. The only recourse to judicial process is when, as often happens, disputes break out concerning the division of property. In the *damoz* form of marriage, in which there is no civil oath, divorce is yet simpler. The wife is given certain presents and a monthly salary for the duration of the marriage. When the husband has to leave for another part of the country, or if the couple quarrel, they simply separate without further ado.

Despite its heavy claim on the energies of its members, then, the Amhara kinship system is such as to make members of the nuclear family relatively independent of extended relationships, and to give the individual marriage partners important areas of independence from each other.

Religious Organization

Membership in the Monophysite Church is automatic for all Amhara except a small percentage who are Muslim. This membership is symbolized by the ceremony of baptism, performed for male infants on the fortieth day and for females on the eightieth. At that time the child receives a special Christian name in addition to his regular family name.

Certain obligations are incumbent upon every member of the church. Foremost among these is the requirement of fasting, which begins for children of both sexes at about the age of seven and introduces a considerable element of constraint into the lives of the Amhara. Second, there is the obligation to observe the Sabbaths and the main holidays by refraining from arduous physical labor on those days. In addition, each household is obliged to contribute a certain quantity of grain to the local church every year.*

Apart from the rigorous fasting requirements, and the injunction not to work on holy days—a dubious hardship—the individual is relatively free of ritual obligations. The rituals demanded by the church are so manifold, and so sacred, that responsibility for them is given to the clergy, and the laymen

* In some areas this is a fixed amount per household (e.g., one or two *quanā*); in others it is proportionate to the wealth of the family. It is collected by a lay official of the church, the *gend alaqā*, though sometimes by the *gabaz*.